



Enjoy an Affordable, Active **FaMiLY** Vacation

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Affordable and active are relative terms, so what might be affordable to one family may not be to another. While hiking five miles may be considered a vigorous activity for some family members, it could be too easy for some or too difficult for others.

Family vacations are helpful and practical activities because they can keep us mentally healthy and improve our work performance. Many studies have shown that vacations help you relax and recharge your batteries. Vacations can build stronger relationships (as in the old saying, “Families that play together stay together”) and they can provide learning opportunities (which might help us be more creative at work or help children in school).

Family vacations do not have to be elaborate, expensive or a long distance from home to be fun and memorable. Here are a few ideas to consider when planning your next getaway:

- * **Assess your family’s interests.** For instance, would you and your children be more interested in hiking, biking, horseback riding, canoeing or fishing? Or, for a winter getaway, consider snowmobiling, dog sledding, snow shoeing or skiing. If those ideas don’t appeal to your family’s interests, consider a vacation planned around indoor activities, such as bowling, ice skating and window shopping at a mall or local downtown shops.
- * **Set a budget.** How much can you afford to spend for the entire trip? Then divide that number by the approximate number of days you will be on your getaway. This will help you decide how far away you can go and the type of accommodations and activities that fit into your budget. Family interests and a budget will help you decide if you should camp at a state park for about \$10/night or spend \$100/night for a hotel with a water park.

*** Research ideas and get your kids involved.**

This could include a trip to the library. Some great books, including “Dakotas Off the Beaten Path” by Robin McMacken, are available. Of course, many Web sites, such as www.familytravelguides.com, www.ndtourism.com and www.travelocity.com, can help you make vacation plans.

State tourism Web sites also can provide ideas. For example, www.exploreminnesota.com has a link, “Family Fun,” which allows you to put in your ZIP code and search for activities five to 50 miles from home. The North Dakota Tourism Web site, www.ndtourism.com/, has a link to educational activities, including paleontological digs. Your kids could be the star of the class when the teacher asks, “What did you do on your summer vacation?” and they respond with, “I studied 60 million-year-old dinosaur fossils.” A trip like this could be supplemented with a trip to the Dakota Dinosaur Museum or the North Dakota Heritage Center. You can find more ideas from the “Free things to do” list also on the Web site.

If dinosaurs aren’t your thing, this region has great state and national parks, such as the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Lake Metigoshe State Park or Lake Itasca (which features the headwaters of the Mississippi River). If you’re looking for a treasure

hunt, try Geocaching (www.geocaching.com/), which is a useful way to engage children and adult minds and keep them physically active. No matter what their interest, get the kids involved by helping plan a getaway; they will be more interested in the upcoming trip.

Here are two more suggestions:

- * After finalizing the destination and activities, plan for the travel.** Find stops along the way to break up the drive. Stop every couple of hours so everyone can walk around and stretch. Stops can be at historic sites along the way or a chance to take family photos with Salem Sue in Salem, N.D., or the metal sculptures along the Enchanted Highway. Also, pack snacks and possibly a picnic lunch to save money. Don’t forget to pack activities, such as travel games or pencils and paper, for kids to entertain themselves in the car. Have a list of games the kids can play (such as “I Spy” or the alphabet game) to keep them focused on fun rather than on the stress of riding in the car.
- * Have fun!** Don’t rush through an activity just to move on to the next one. Plan some down time to enjoy the company and relax.

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